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Abstract

Ncnverbal behaviors as part cf the communication process in interpersonal relationships has recently become of interest to therapists. Usual investigations cf nonverbal behavior have involved observations and ratings cf the subjects' behaviors in interview and ccnventional treatment situations. The author's interest is in: (1) teaching people increasing awareness of their own and others' nonverbal ways of communicating emoticns to facilitate growth in living, and (2) evaluating the usefulness of these techniques as another potentially valuable approach in psychotherapy. Efforts made in exploring nonverbal techniques have been confined, in this repcrt, to carefully selected individuals with whom follcw-up procedures have been utilized. The participants were screened by experienced psychclogists. An open-ended post experience questionnaire was used to find out about: (1) expectations of the experience, (2) likes and dislikes of the exercises, and (3) effects on behavior. A reaction report written by the subject afterwards was also used. Feedback was varied and biased. A development of standard approaches is the next step. Examples cf techniques are included, among them being use of video tape and peer ratings. (Author/KJ)

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EVALUATION AND NONVERBAL TECHNIQUES

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EVALUATION AND NONVERBAL TECHNIQUES

Earlier in the history of psychology, there was much interest in observing the behavior of people but gradually naturalistic observations gave way to other approaches to study man. More recently, this trend has been changed and nonverbal behaviors have come to the foreground as an area to be investigated, especially in psychotherapy. Studies of nonverbal behavior are beginning to appear more frequently in the professional literature. The work by Bernie Gunther at Big Sur, California, and the wide distribution of the book "Joy" by W. Schutz (1967) have both re-kindled interest in nonverbal activities as a way of communicating between people.

Nonverbal behavior in therapy provides cues as to understanding of the client's verbalizations and often the behavior is at variance with the clients verbalizations (Mahl, et al., 1959). Nonverbal behavior also can be a way of expressing emotions that may be difficult to verbalize. At times, such behavior is apt to express reactions of the individual without the filtering process that often accompanies verbalizations. The filtering process involves such things as grammatical organization, logical presentation and probably censorship.

One of the most comprehensive reports of research into nonverbal behavior is reported by Ekman and Friesen (1968). They present material on previous studies as well as their current investigations through the use of sound films regarding the kinds of information derived from behavioral cues. They attempt to demonstrate that "visually distinctive movements or positions have distinctive psychological meaning," (1968, p. 213). These investigations and those reported by Mahl (1968) certainly emphasize the informational value nonverbal behavior has for clinical problems.

Other studies of nonverbal communication illustrate the diversity of approaches in nonverbal behavior. The study by Drag and Shaw (1967) of facial expressions used to communicate various emotions, the report by Zacker and Buchenholz (1967) of program activities for communication with inarticulate adolescents and the study by Delaney and Heimann (1966) on the perception of nonverbal communications in sensitivity training, reflect the renewed interest in nonverbal behavior.

Many of the investigations of nonverbal behavior deal with observations and attempts at measuring the observed behavior changes. The interaction is often minimal and the assessment is of the expert rating the performing client. Attempts to systematically change nonverbal behavior directly or to explore such possibilities have rarely been attempted or at least reported in the professional literature.

Nonverbal behaviors can have a reciprocating effect. Psychologists utilizing this technique by actively participating with the client as well as verbally instructing the client in the techniques should learn about nonverbal behaviors of his own as well as those of his client. In addition, modeling and imitating by the client of behaviors demonstrated by the therapist may be readily adaptable by the individual client to his own emotional expression. This seems to be an extension of the idea that clients adopt some of our values even though we do not intentionally wish this to occur.

A demonstration of our own work with nonverbal techniques has been presented to you today. We feel that as we explore ways of utilizing this technique, that more evaluation of what we do is needed. Because of our concern for the ethical questions involved as well as the impact on clients of these new approaches, our efforts have been confined to individuals who have been carefully selected and with whom follow-up procedures have been utilized. In this connection, participants in nonverbal groups have been screened through interviews with

experienced psychologists. Debriefing interviews and follow-up data have been obtained through the use of post-group discussions, individual interviews, written reaction reports and open-ended questionnaires coupled with interviews.

The open-ended questionnaire, which is filled out before the post-experience interview, consists of 13 items. The questions attempt to find out about such areas as expectations people had for the experience, likes and dislikes of the nonverbal exercises, effects of the experience on behavior afterwards and the participants sensitivity to others. The following examples are taken from the open-ended questionnaire. Two different individuals' responses are given to each question.

1. What were your fantasies about what the group experience would be like?

   A. "I was nervous about revealing myself in a group. However, I was skeptical because of an article I read in Time magazine."

   B. "I was apprehensive of aggression, didn't know exactly what to expect."

2. What was the hardest exercise to do? Easiest? Why?

   A. "Hardest when I felt male's face." (Why) "Brought up not to do that kind of touching." (Easiest) "Feeling my own body."

   B. "The exercise when we were to fall was the hardest for me since I never was able to relax and feel safe knowing somebody would catch me."

3. Do you feel now that you are more sensitive to people? How?

   A. "Yes, I view myself differently and therefore others, too."

   B. "Somewhat. I am more senstive to facial movements, especially."

These examples can and do suggest reactions to such experiences that need to be studied to better evaluate the impact of such experiences.

Another source of follow-up information is the reaction report. This consists of a few paragraphs the individual writes after the experience. As they

are in narrative or free form, the individual responds to whatever aspect of the experience he wishes. The following excerpt is presented to illustrate this form of information.

"After a few trials, the uncomfortableness began to leave and I began to experience some feelings that were entirely new to me. Previously, I had no idea of the diversity of emotion one is capable of communicating through touch. What was more surprising was that the more experience I had and the harder I concentrated, the better I got at it. What a great way to relate to each other!"

We have learned that positive feedback to us from the experiences of nonverbal groups may be biased and that the lasting effects vary. This is probably due, in part, to variation in the particular experiences as well as to many other factors. At this point, we are now moving to more careful evaluation procedures of the nonverbal approaches and I would like to present some suggested ways of investigating this technique.

The development of a series of standard approaches for expressing emotions is a task ahead of us. Whether to use the drumming of fingers, the pounding of a pillow or an interactional shoving technique separately, in series, mixed with other emotional expressions and/or verbalizations at different times is an open question. Some techniques will be more useful than others and we have tentatively tried variations in some of our groups.

Peer ratings of individuals nonverbal emotional behavior expressions before and after such experiences as compared to therapists and/or other outside expert ratings of such behaviors also is a potentially useful approach. This might be aimed at the question, do people really change their nonverbal behavior having been "taught" how to do so.

Another idea is to pre-test fantasy productions, then expose clients to nonverbal training and then re-test fantasy productions to identify what changes, if any, may occur in this area of personality. This approaches the question of

changing behavior to change personality. Some evidence has been gained for this approach through the use of an adolescent self-concept group (James, et al., 1967) where the focus was on personal appearance and manner.

Another approach utilizes a video tape procedure in which nonverbal techniques are utilized in a group setting, with immediate visual feedback which is then discussed in the group as to impressions and feelings generated. Taped segments could be also used in an attempt to rate behavioral expression of feeling over a period of several sessions by trained raters.

In any use of the nonverbal techniques, attempts to assess process, impact or outcome should be utilized in order to gain a better understanding of this potentially powerful technique.

SUMMARY

Nonverbal behaviors as part of the communication process in interpersonal relationships has recently become of interest to therapists. Usual investigations of nonverbal behavior have involved observations and ratings of the subjects' behaviors in interview and conventional treatment situations. Our interest is in teaching people increasing awareness of their own and others nonverbal ways of communicating emotions to facilitate growth in living and to evaluate the usefulness of these techniques as another potentially valuable approach in psychotherapy.

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